

Inventories of Textiles – Textiles in Inventories. Late Medieval and Early Modern Period

Veranstalter: Museum für angewandte Kunst Wien; Department of Economic and Social History, University of Vienna)

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Over the past thirty years historians have come to recognise that inventories open many windows into the past, particularly as they pertain to the study of textiles. Yet for all their potential, inventories still pose multiple methodological problems. The goal of this workshop was to bring together an interdisciplinary group of scholars to discuss these problems. Held in Vienna on March 27–28 at the Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst (MAK), the workshop brought together a diverse mix of anthropologists, ethnologists, museum curators, and social, economic, linguistic, and art historians. Spanning the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the panellists covered a geographical scope ranging from Portugal to the Ottoman Empire and from Italy to Scandinavia.

One reason inventories pose so many challenges is that there are many different kinds of them. This diversity was fully brought out by the panellists who assessed probate inventories (Richard Stapleford, Jessica Hallett, and Burkhard Pöttler), elite ‘shopping lists’ (Sarah-Grace Heller and Annemarie Stauffer), treasury inventories (Hedda Reindl-Kiel, Christiane M. Elster), and bankruptcy inventories (John Jordan and Gabi Schopf). Each kind of inventory presents its own methodological dilemmas with regards to the accuracy of the compiler, the breadth of social groups inventoried, and the period of life covered.

This broad scope of source material brought many themes to the forefront. A major one present in many contributions, was historians’ attempts to decipher a scribe’s description to identify precisely the kind of fabric, pattern, and colour of the textile being described. This task is made more difficult because it is often not possible to match an ex-

tant textile with its inventorial description. CHIARA BUSS (Milan) took a novel approach to this problem. Using a sample book-like census of the Milan weaver’s guild from 1628, she tried to re-match silk samples which had fallen out of place with their original descriptions. Buss paid special attention to the descriptions of colours and patterns, and was thereby able to enrich our knowledge of contemporary colour perceptions.

Besides identifying the fabrics, another common theme was the challenge to trace the geographic origins of specific textiles. CHRISTIANE M. ELSTER (Cologne) examined medieval Papal inventories, and frequently found textiles of global provenance, although she noted it is often difficult to distinguish whether these were imports or locally produced imitations of foreign designs. This wide geographical scope, she argued, was symbolic of the papacy’s international reach, and its claim to be a world-wide church. JESSICA HALLETT (Lisbon) probed the estate inventory of Dom Teodósio (1510–1563), Duke of Braganza, and deftly chronicled the international origins of the goods: Turkish and Persian carpets, Chinese silk and porcelain, and Indian quilts, curtains, and tablecloths. In the duke’s possessions, Hallett saw not only an avid collector of textiles, but also a man who treasured his textiles more than the fine arts. SHARON FARMER (Santa Barbara) centred her talk on the professional activities of Parisian silk-weavers in the late thirteenth century: how was the work divided? Who washed, dyed, and prepared the silk? Looking into royal accounts and noble inventories, she demonstrated that although most Parisian-produced silk was consumed locally, much of the raw material was imported from the shores around the Caspian Sea.

Textiles as gifts given by elites and representative of contemporary fashions was a theme covered in many papers. Focusing on the Ottoman court in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, HEDDA REINDL-KIEL (Istanbul) examined noble fashion, but did it through the lens of gift-giving (Ottoman household members received new clothing twice a year). In these practices, she found that Ottoman protocol did not follow domes-

tic fashions, but oriented itself towards established patterns and the (supposed) inclinations of the recipients. SARAH-GRACE HELLER (Columbus) looked at the inventories and household account books of Mahaut, Countess of Artois (1268-1329). Like Reindl-Kiel, Heller examined the clothes nobles wore, but also looked at the clothes given to the household staff by their superiors. Through this, she was able to observe how fashion was already influencing consumption and shopping in the late Middle Ages. ANNEMARIE STAUFFER (Cologne) did not look at gift-giving, but did follow in the same vein of looking at the clothes court personnel wore. She assessed how Charles the Bold (1433-1477), Duke of Burgundy, clothed his court for his 1473 meeting in Brugge with the Holy Roman Emperor, Friedrich III. Using the inventories left by Charles, and a later painting of the event, Stauffer extensively detailed the types, cuts, and designs of the fabrics worn by Charles' retinue in their attempts to impress the Emperor.

Courtly sources also informed the work of Paula Hohti and Richard Stapleford. Using an inventory created upon the capturing of Duke John of Finland, (1537-1592), PAULA HOHTI (Copenhagen) assessed not only the type of textiles and their origins (principally wool from England and Holland) in the duke's possessions, but also charted central European influence on the changing fashion patterns in Scandinavian noble dress. RICHARD STAPLEFORD (New York) continued with the theme of looking at nobles, but instead of looking at the court, he centred his talk on Lorenzo di Medici (1449-1492). Stapleford noted that whereas most of the wealth of contemporary Florentine families lay in household furnishings and clothes, much more of Lorenzo's wealth was in his collections (jewels, clocks, musical instruments, Chinese porcelain, and paintings).

While most of the talks focused on elites or nobles, two of the presentations aimed at a broader social tapestry. Using a set of probate inventories from the Austrian province of Styria, BURKHARD PÖTTLER (Graz) examined the fabrics, conditions, and designs of clothes of ordinary people from 1665 to 1787. Linen was the principal textile, but

Pöttler was able to observe the emergence of cottons, and gradual sartorial change. GABI SCHOPF and JOHN JORDAN (both from Bern) approached similar themes, but through bankruptcy inventories in the Swiss city of Bern from 1650 to 1800. Their talk sketched the outlines of a larger research project, while also paying particular attention to the problem of identifying printed cotton textiles in inventories.

Conference Overview:

Thomas Ertl (University of Vienna), Opening Remarks

Panel I: Middle Ages

Christiane Elster (University of Cologne), Inventories and Textiles of the Papal Treasury around 1300. Concepts of Papal Representation in Written and Material Media.

Sarah-Grace Heller (Ohio State University), Revisiting the Inventories of Artois: Mahaut and the Line between Treasure and Fashion.

Sharon Farmer (University of California-Santa Barbara), Finding Parisian Silk in Aristocratic and Royal Accounts.

Panel II: Early Modern Period I

Annemarie Stauffer (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences), A List of Garments for Charles the Bold's entourage sent to Tommaso Portinari in Bruges in 1473.

Richard Stapleford (Hunter College, New York), The Fabric of Life in the 1492 Inventory of the Estate of Lorenzo de' Medici.

Jessica Hallett (New University of Lisbon), All His Worldly Possessions, Textiles in the Inventory of the 5th Duke of Braganza, 1563.

Paula Hohti (Danish Centre for Textile Research, Copenhagen), European Influences on Scandinavian Noble Dress: Textiles and Clothing in the Surviving Inventories in Finland, 1550-1600.

Panel II: Early Modern Period II

Chiara Buss (Textile History Studio, Milan), Documentation of Genovese Textile Production – A Special Pattern Book

Burkhard Pöttler (University of Graz),

Clothes and Cloths in Styrian Probate Inventories of the Late 17th and 18th Centuries.

Hedda Reindl-Kiel (Koc University, Istanbul),
The Empire of Fabrics – The Range of Fabrics
in Internal Ottoman Gift Traffic and Textiles
as Ottoman Diplomatic Gifts (16th-18th Cen-
turies).

Gabi Schopf / John Jordan (University of
Bern), Cottons and *Indiennes* in Early Mod-
ern Swiss Inventories.

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